

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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New Orleans Approach

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, of which the Monterey History and Art Assn. is a member, held its 12th annual conference in New Orleans Oct 30 to Nov. 2. The National Trust is the owner of the Casa Amesti on Polk street in Monterey, now the headquarters of the Old Capitol Club.

We have learned from the report of that conference that there is a fast growing movement, all over the United States, in zoning for preservation of historic buildings and sites and to prevent in those areas buildings which, on the outside at least, do not conform architecturally.

For the sake of brevity, as it ties in with California architecture, and the value commercially to the city in this movement, we will limit this article to what is being done in New Orleans. We did not attend the recent conference, but we did spend considerable time in New Orleans two years ago, visiting the old city and various parts of the community.

New Orleans' revenue then as now, comes from its port and Vieux Carre, or French Quarter. The local Chamber of Commerce reported recently that the Vieux Carre alone brings in \$90,000,000 a year in the form of tourist dollars. A staggering sum!

The Vieux Carre Commission was authorized by an act of the state legislature in 1938 and a City of New Orleans ordinance was passed in 1937. These were brought up to date in 1956.

In the last eight years, we have been told, at least five test cases for violation of the Vieux Carre ordinance have been taken to the Supreme Court of the United States and each case has been decided in favor of the Vieux Commission. These cases involved signs, demolition and alteration that would have been detrimental to the beauty and history of the district

One of the most Important cases is an opinion by Justice Douglas in the case of Berman vs. Parker which was decided Nov. 22, 1954, and which had unanimous approval of the court. Here follows an excerpt from that case:

"The public welfare is broad and inclusive, the values it represents are spiritual as well as physical, esthetic as

well as monetary. It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community be beautiful as well as carefully patrolled."

Both California and Louisiana have Spanish backgrounds and there is a great similarity in architecture between some of the early homes there and here. True, the fronts of the buildings in the Vieux Carre use Iron grills on their balconies but, in the rear patios, the second story used wood in its railing such as we see in Monterey and such as was used on the balcony of the Alpheus Thompson house in Santa Barbara.

The buildings in the French quarters are of brick, which, when whitewashed, resemble the adobe buildings in California. The old buildings there are built to the line of the sidewalk, with covered passages for walks mid wider ones for driveways leading through iron grill gates to the patios in the rear.

From the gate, the tourist can often catch a glimpse of one corner of the patio with its flowers and plants against the 18 to 20-foot brick walls which separate it from the building next door. Out of sight from the gate are what were once the slave quarters facing the patio, but which are now remodeled into charming guest rooms.

While some of the buildings in the French quartet are still being used as homes; most of them have been adapted for shops, tea rooms, clubs, etc., bringing a higher rental because of their attractiveness and thus encouraging their preservation.

The members of the National Trust for Historic Preservation were entertained with lavish and gracious hospitality, Mr. and Mrs. Gledhill, the enthusiastic curators of the Santa Barbara Historical Museum who flew down for the New Orleans meeting, have reported to us.

A candle light tour of eight of the patios in the French quarter with the owners, dressed in Civil War costumes of beautiful silks and laces, was something never to be forgotten and in all cases they were shown the charming interior of their homes.

That is what the Monterey History and Art Assn. has been striving to do for many years - the best of our early Monterey adobe houses have been opened for an annual tour in August but we have been minus the old Spanish or early California costumes; on the hostesses. We saw these lovely examples of gowns two years ago

in Natchez and it added a great deal to the appreciation of the tour of the anti-bellum homes of the south.